**Notes and actions from LINK-SNH liaison on 8 November 2018**

*Participating*

*LINK - Charles Dundas, Craig Macadam, Paul Walton, Diarmid Hearns, Jen Anderson*

*SNH - Francesca Osowska, David O’Brien, Ed Mackie, Sally Thomas*

The meeting followed up summer discussion with Francesca and colleagues of LINK concerns around (1) evidence base for biodiversity reporting and (2) the deficit of a strong environmental champion in government. Francesca, Charles and Jen had subsequently talked, noting LINK’s unsuccessful effort over several years to develop dialogue at senior level with SNH to complement the strong technical-level relationships which the network has with SNH staff. This meeting therefore aimed at a shared understanding on these two areas and at identifying scope for greater collaboration.

Francesca welcomed LINK and Charles welcomed this strategic discussion focussed on these key issues.

1. Evidence base, State of Nature (SON) reporting, Process to 2020 and beyond

Paul spoke to LINK’s paper, provided in advance, pointing to the global standard to which the SON process applies, noting that absence of agreement would make collaboration between LINK and SNH challenging for the process beyond 2020 and encouraging a bridging of differences. He confirmed that LINK wished to see a proper context for reporting, not over hundreds of years, but equally not simply the last three decades; he referenced areas where SON accesses systematically acquired data which is of real value.

David welcomed recent invitation to SNH to join the SON project, agreeing the need for a shared evidence base even if interpretations might differ on occasion; he had no concerns about the latest SON report; SNH was comfortable with the new approach after some earlier internal disagreement and change of personnel. SNH would use methods for earlier and later eras, taking back context into account as well as improvements since. Where speaking to declines, SNH would not necessarily give negative messages so much as focus messaging around improvement needed.

Paul welcomed this direction of travel. Francesca supported partnership between SNH and LINK as a more collaborative context for the 2019 report, to ensure the appropriate kind of evidence base through production. However, she reiterated Govt’s interest in highlighting areas of progress, where ENGOs would be more likely to focus on areas of difficulty.

Craig noted the current lack of a space in which to jointly consider priorities, causes of change and how to address these. Francesca said SNH wanted to develop that kind of dialogue in the lead up to 2020 and was having conversations with various stakeholders.

Sally felt SNH and LINK both wanted to improve the environment and needed to agree constructively together what works and doesn’t. She was keen to avoid disagreements (such as during the discussion of Route-map 1) and reported governance arrangements for post 2020 were being discussed - i.e. evidence stream, new strategy/route-map/challenge document, process for engagement with the public on the importance to society. The current working groups and coordinating group would continue up to the 2020 targets, with the new governance structure for ‘Beyond 2020’ coming alongside, and a changeover happening from 2019 some time. She saw LINK as being well embedded in the Aichi work to 2020 and said SNH would present its proposed new governance structure to LINK for input.

Paul, Craig and Diarmid - noting the value of what Route-map 1 had achieved, and LINK members’ roles as key deliverers - pressed for co-involvement in devising the right process; a co-production structure for the historic environment chaired at Cab Sec level and productively engaging all concerned was cited.

David wondered if the SON was the space for discussion with government about priorities. Sally felt the agreement reached over Route-map 1 would inform Route-map 2, and agreement over the evidence base was a good foundation for agreeing what needed to be done ahead. David added that SNH was keen to capitalise on citizen science and ensure a publicly owned domain.

Francesca summarised SNH’s and LINK’s shared interest in Route-map 2 being a shared endeavour, process and document, and agreed with LINK that reflection of a common voice on priorities would be critical for future funding to support biodiversity work in Scotland.

2. Championing Scotland’s nature

Francesca moved discussion on, noting that despite all efforts, nature is not hitting as high as it should, and that a step-change is required, a ‘movement for nature’ and people’s engagement with that, which then helps to generate funding. She invited comments.

Charles confirmed LINK’s concern to see environment championed in Government, LINK members’ roles as critical partners with wider memberships to call on. LINK was keen to collaborate on this area also with SNH. Diarmid and Craig encouraged proactive involvement of LINK/members by SNH to sell key messages.

Paul encouraged a focus on the conservation needs, rather than simply on iconic species. Sally pointed to the valued Species on the Edge project collaboration. Ed noted the value of approaching issues from the geographical scale of sub-river basin. Joint work by HES and SNH was noted.

WRT the need for national level policy and advice on landscape, an agenda which is weak in Scotland though affected by many issues such as energy, housing, biodiversity, Diarmid reported on plans for a broad landscape alliance pulling in environmental and other interests so as to get past polarisations, on a subject where Government also wants resolution. He asked how this national advocacy role fits SNH’s remit for landscape.

Sally indicated that SNH would prefer an arms’ length relationship with the alliance though thought SNH could engage at the thematic level. Francesca confirmed SNH’s interest in feeding in. SNH as an NDPB could not be in the position of being seen to be behind an outcome which in the end they can’t support via their stated corporate plan objectives. In addition, they are keen not to be drawn away from the root remit in conservation, so their focus is on nature *and* people, per recent discussion with ECCLR on spending. However, she agreed there is an issue around a common voice, ensuring good future stewardship, intrinsic value. Whilst SNH and LINK are different communities they can find scope via natural capital and biodiversity headings to build common themes, and a shared narrative will help both communities with funding, without undermining our respective positions. Ed Mackie encouraged a focus on the kind of Scotland we want in future.

Charles indicated that LINK would support moving a shared narrative forward.

Craig asked for clarification following the Coul Links pre-inquiry meeting about whether appropriate assessment would be carried out under RAMSAR rules. Francesca confirmed that she had received the eNGOs’ letter about this issue and was considering it.

Actions

The meeting closed with agreement that:

* LINK will give SNH its thoughts on appropriate structure and process for the post 2020 Route-map, basing suggestions on developments to the current arrangements
* LINK/eNGOs will keep SNH informed of the plans for and aims of a wider alliance on landscape so that SNH can confirm a more definitive position in relation
* SNH is keen to hear about ideas to significantly encourage wide popular awareness of and support for the nature /environment agenda and suggests discussion at comms levels around this
* SNH and LINK will continue these meetings and SNH will consider LINK’s suggestion of boards-level engagement

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